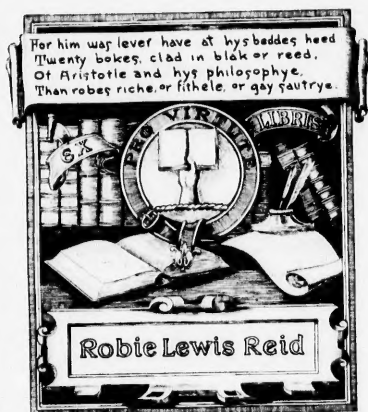


GOLD STRIKE ON THE KLONDYKE

J.C. Brewer

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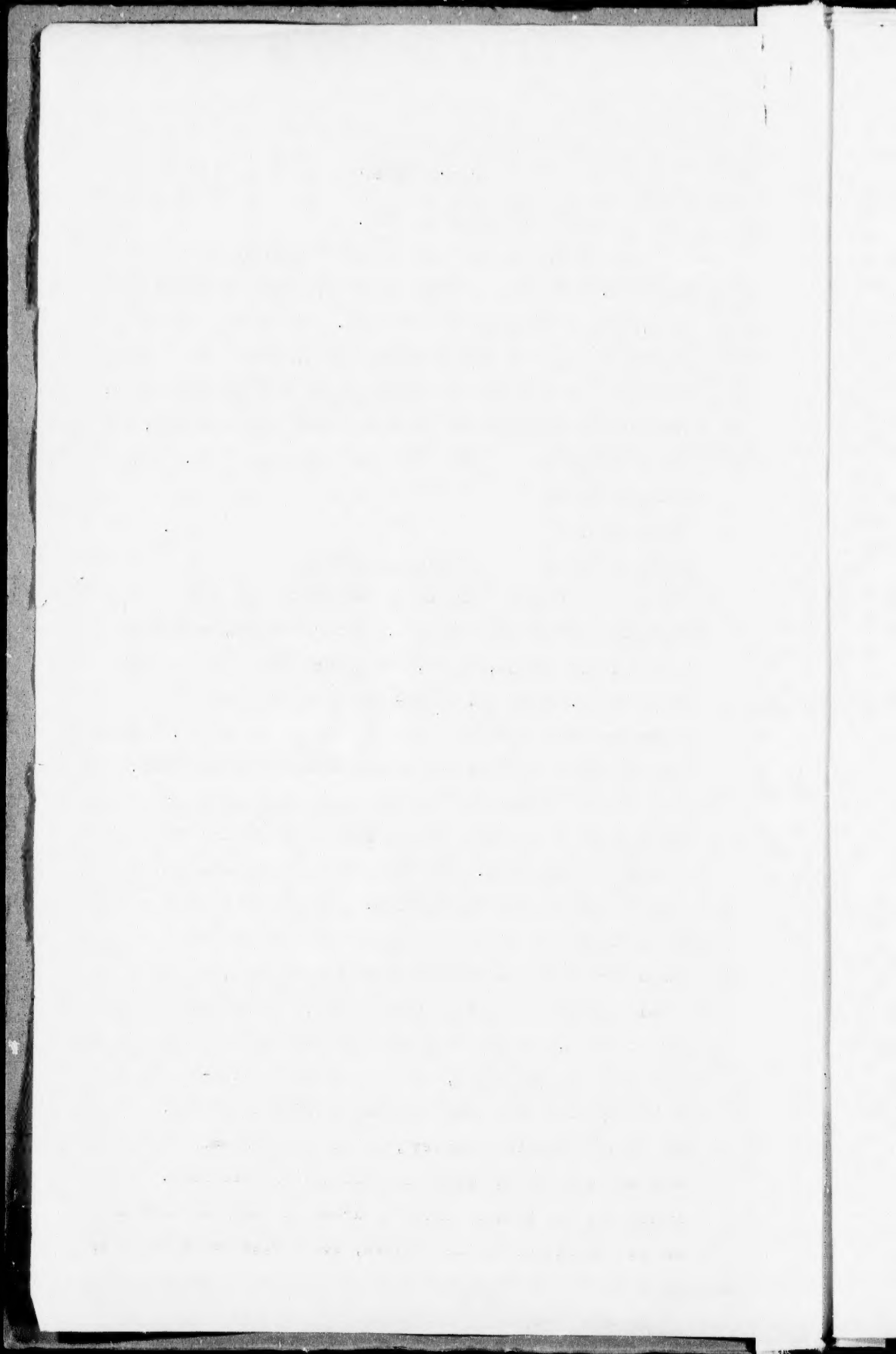
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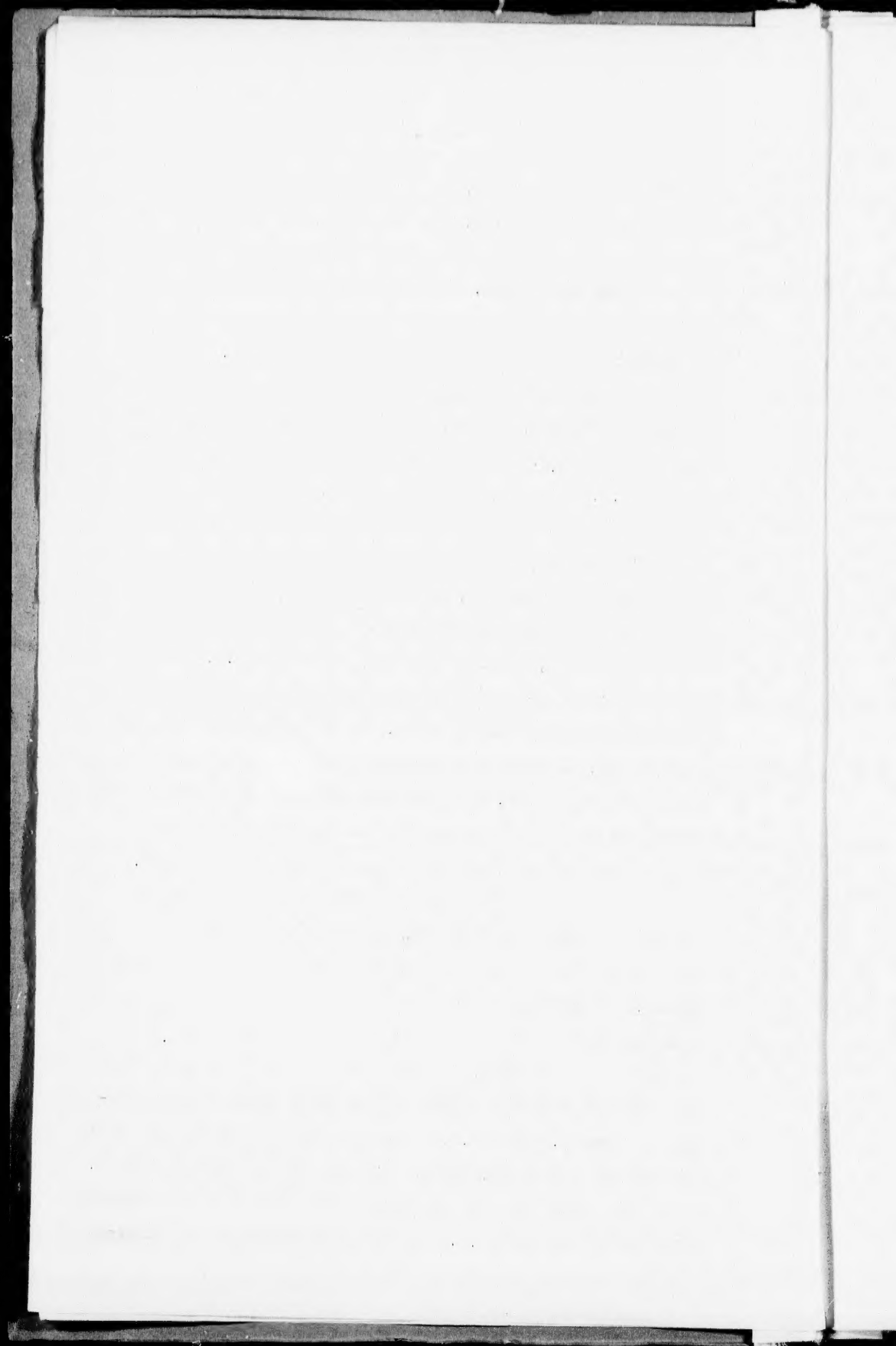
Left for Yukon in 1897.

I got the news of the great gold strike on the Klondyke. I bought a boat twenty feet long and five foot beam, and one Tibbits went with me. We left Alert Bay and went up the Vancouver Island shore, then crossed the Sound to the mainland and headed up Queen Charlotte Sound. The weather was fine and we sailed with light breezes, rowing at times and taking advantage of the tides. We skipped Millbank Sound by a little channel which cut the rocky cape, one too small to be marked on our chart. We called at Bella Bella and at the mouth of the Skeena River and Port Essington; thence to Metlakahla and twenty miles farther North at Port Simpson. George Rudge, a marble cutter from Victoria, and Dr. McGillvary had built a little hotel there. The old stern-wheel steamer "Caledonia" was hauled out for the winter and the crew at the hotel. Rudge took me out in the evening to introduce me to the Town. Some of the houses were painted quite nice and in one house there was a very pretty little Klotchman playing "Yankee Doodle" on the piano. We left Port Simpson and crossed to Portland Canal on a strong wind. We passed through a number of small islands and landed at Tungass Island where there was an old deserted Hudson Bay building, a small trading store and an old Dease packer, who was still strong and vigorous. Some white men were here from the Nass River with their Indian women, and as they had a five-gallon keg of whisky with them they were having hilarious time. A man called "Russian Charley", hailing from Juneau, had a small boat and stopped at the Indian Village of Ketchikan. The Priest and the Indians tried to drive him away because he was giving liquor to the natives, so Charley got a stick of

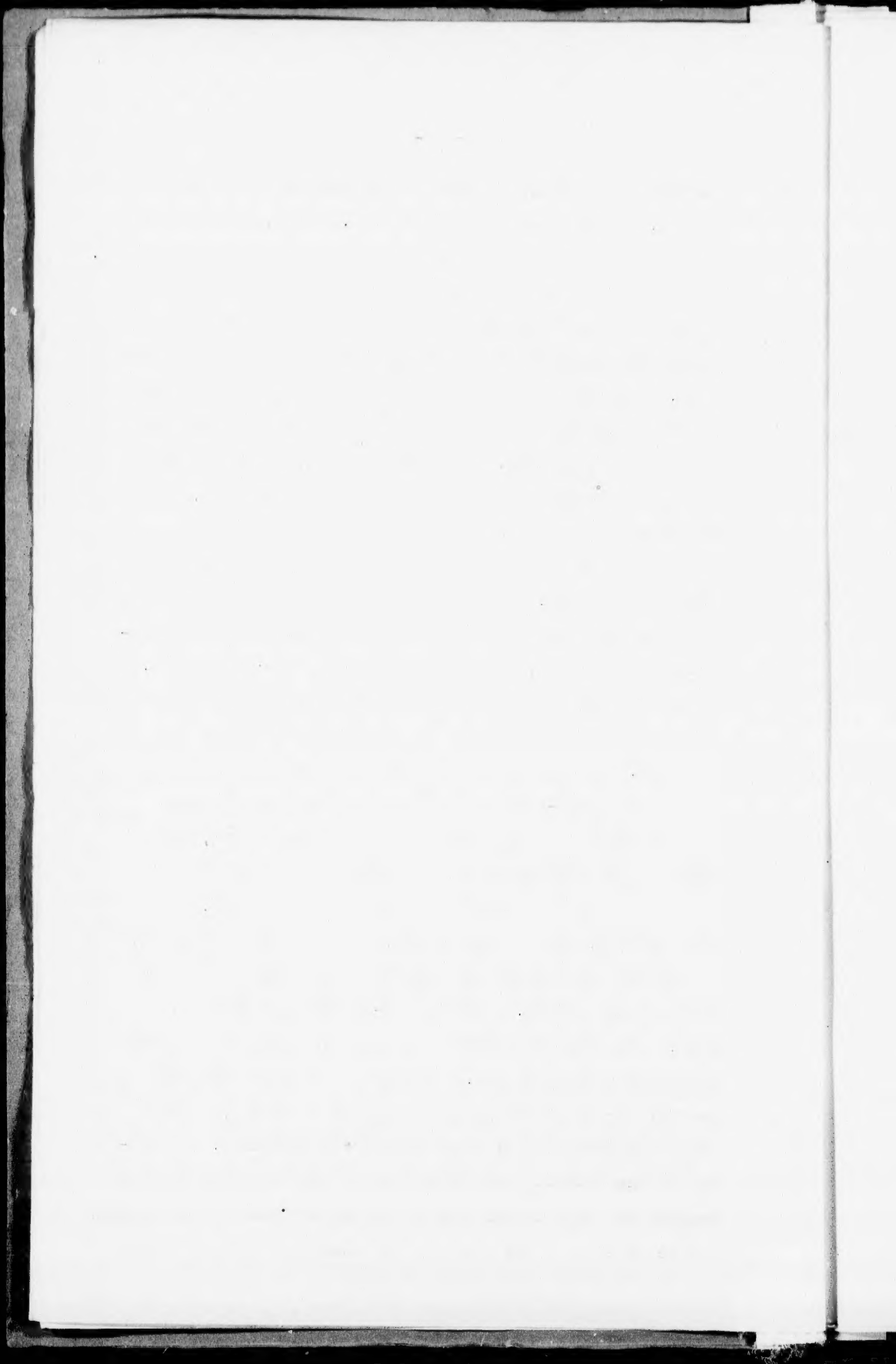


dynamite out of his boat, put a cap on a piece of fuse and stuck it in the dynamite; lit the fuse, and then the Priest and the Indians hit the high spots down through the Town with Charley after them. When it was about ready to go off he threw it at them and the first explosion occurred in Ketchikan, but the bunch were at a safe distance.

There were two German fishermen there who wanted passage to Wrangel, Alaska, and as they knew the route we took them with us. With a fair wind we passed Mary's Island and the U.S. Custom House at Foggy Bay. After leaving there we lost our course among the Islands and went to the head of Fool's Channel, our German guides not having the knowledge which they had professed; but after a time we reached Wrangel at the mouth of the Stikkeen River. This was the seaport of the Dease miners, a point 280 miles inland in B.C. It was also the stopping-place for the Klondyke and Yukon stampedeers who went over the Teslin Trail. A lot of people were here with horses, mules and goats to haul their goods over the trail to Teslin Lake. In the winter it was 150 miles up the Stikkeen River to Telegraph Creek and 150 miles through the hills to Teslin Lake, one of the headwaters of the Yukon. This was to be the all-Canadian route. A railroad was to be built by McKenzie and Mann, from Telegraph Creek to the Lake from which a line of stern-wheel steamers would run to Dawson. Some Victoria people had sent Captains McDonald and York with machinery and a small sawmill ^{outfit} to build the first steamer on Teslin Lake, and they were to haul the machinery over the trail in the winter with sixteen mules and some Indian dog teams. The B.C. Government had sent in Surveyors to lay out two townsites, one at the head of the lake and the other part down the lake at Morley Bay, where the line divides Yukon Territory from B.C. Some men had gone up the Stikkeen



to Telegraph Creek, and the Indians were loading their canoes. Some tried to go up in small boats, but not being used to swift water they came back and went by way of Skagway. There was great excitement, even the Indian women wanted to go in with the white men, and one of them cornered me on the street and wanted to take her with ^{me} so she could get some gold. She was so persistent that I told her I had three wives and sixteen children coming up on the next boat and so could not take her. Here we got reports that there was no food in Dawson and people would have to come out. Steamers were going by loaded with people for Skagway and a party offered us \$200 to take two tons of their outfit to Telegraph Creek in our boat. We decided to go in over the Teslin Lake Trail, so we loaded their stuff in our boat with some provisions of our own, enough to last us to Telegraph Creek. We hoisted sail and ran out with a big wind thirty miles up the river and from there as it was getting swift we took the tow-line. We had not gone far when we met a boat coming down with a ship-wrecked man, who said that he and his partners were going up the river with their outfit, and when crossing the river at a point where the water ran swiftly the boat swung round and struck a deadhead or snag. The boat swamped, he lost his outfit, his partner was drowned; but he had hung to the snag till this boat coming down the river picked him up. Our round-bottom boat was a hard drag. Tibbits and Crats were of little good, but Albert Graff and I did the work. We got up 100 miles when the weather turned colder and slush ice began to run, so we piled the stuff on the shore and pitched our tent. We arranged that Tibbits and Crats should take the boat back to Wrangel and sell it and come up on the ice when it was frozen, and we would haul the stuff up to Telegraph Creek with sleds



that we had with us. As I saw the boat go round the first turn I told Albert that that was the last we would see of them or the boat. We knew it would be a long time freezing up hard enough for us to haul on the river, so we built a log cabin and cut 25 cords of wood for the big rush of steamers that would come up in the Spring.

After it froze sufficiently we hauled the stuff in relays to Telegraph Creek. There were hundreds of men who went over the several routes to the Yukon in ninety-eight that had no experience and knew nothing of this kind of life. Many were drowned, some froze, some died of scurvy. We ran the outfit up to Telegraph Creek and got the \$200 (the hardest money I ever earned). There were two trading stores for Highland's and Colbrath's. They had pack trains which carried freight to Dease Lake and the old Dease diggings. A number of men were waiting to go over the Teslin Trail in the Spring, the most conspicuous figure being Hector McLaine, a tall, lanky halfbreed. He wore a cartridge belt around his waist and a forty-four Colts revolver on his hip, and he tried his luck on McPherson, a wood-chopper from down the river. Dr. Carlyle took me up to see him and we found him lying on the floor in his cabin with a bad gash in his neck, the main artery, while laid bare, was not cut. Dr. Carlyle was from Philadelphia and he played the part of the good Samaritan, he doctored the sick, patched up the wounded and cut toes off frozen feet.

Albert and I were anxious to go on, so we sold our cordwood on the Stickeen, bought 1200 pounds of provisions and two hand sleighs and started on the Teslin Trail. When we came to the Taltan, a small stream which cut through a high bench, we met two sorry looking men, one Alex Urquhart, and the other a man by the name of Boone, who claimed to be a descend-

ant of Daniel Boone. Urquhart had his frozen toes cut off by Dr. Carlyle, and Boone was ruptured on both sides and they were hobbling around their tent trying to keep warm. We hauled their outfit to the opposite bank of the Tatan, to give them a start. They were both plucky and said they would reach Teslin before Spring or die in the attempt. Boone never reached Teslin. He died at Long Lake and was buried there.

We pushed on to Cowkatsie Mountain. The trail was very steep in places, and we had to cut steps to pull up 100 pounds each. When we reached the top we were 50 miles from Telegraph Creek. The outfit with the machinery for the steamboat and saw-mill was 15 miles ahead. Some of the men knew me and Capt. McDonald came back with his dog team to meet us. He wanted us to leave our provisions on the top of the mountain and he would send it to the Lake by Indian dog teams. He wanted us to work for him, ~~he wanted us to work for him~~, making a trail ahead of his outfit and we agreed. This arrangement was a great relief to us. We went to where the outfit was camped. Things looked blue there as food for the mules was getting low and they were very lean. We worked the outfit across the Nealine River, a branche of the Tackie. It looked as if the outfit would not reach Teslin Lake before the Trail broke up in the Spring. Capt. McDonald went back to Telegraph Creek and hired all the Indian dog teams he could get. We killed the mules for dog feed. He sent a number of us with four dog teams of provisions to put in the foundation for the sawmill at the Lake. There was nobody there except one old Indian woman, one white man and two Indians. We got the mill ready for the circular saw and small boiler. We lived on fish caught through the ice which was then $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick,

we had some flour and the indians brought us moose meat. Dog teams began to arrive with the machinery in charge of Harry Chapman, a machinist and engineer, afterwards well-known in the Yukon and at White Horse. With him was Jimmy Gordon, later Superintendent of engineers on the Yukon. Some parts had been lost on the trail but we made duplicates. Men pulling handsleighs began to arrive from Telegraph Creek and we got news of the terrible murder on the Stickeen River. A man killed two men, took their outfit and came in on the Teslin Trail. Police were sent from Victoria, and he was arrested and taken to Vancouver and hung. We could get no news about Dawson or the big rush that went by way of Skagway and White Horse. At the end of April came warm days and frosty nights. There were people along the Trail from Telegraph to Teslin, and a number of persons put the remnants of their provisions on sleighs, hoisted sail and went down on the ice to the foot of the Lake, 100 miles. There they built boats and rafts and went down the Kootalinqua River to Dawson. Some were at Long Lake where they built boats and came down the little Teslin River to Teslin, after the ice went out. The H. Bay Co. was building a large log building on the new townsite. Food was scarce and Switzer started a restuarant on five tins of salmon, 10 pounds of beans and a slab of rusty bacon. No provisions could arrive on the Lake until the pack train came in after the snow went off. Rivers are clear of ice 16 to 20 days before the lakes are. Major Walsh arrived at the Lake with a bunch of soldiers, several of whom I had known on the coast. Bill Smith who was there with his younger brother was afterwards drowned in the Klondyke River, opposite Dawson, while trying to save a man from drowning.

The ice broke up on the Rivers and the end of

snow on the Teslin Trail put an end to communication by handsleigh. Boats began to arrive from Long Lake, the little sawmill was cutting lumber, and the ship carpenters were building the steamboat. Jim Thompson, an old friend of mine, went to the Teslin River with Albert Graff and I and cut and skidded portages by the Falls. There were not many accidents among the small boats coming from Long Lake though several persons lost their outfits. Everything was at a standstill waiting for the pack-horses from Telegraph Creek. While waiting there Albert and I went over to the Jennings River on a prospecting trip. Bush fires were running in all directions, the flies were thick, and the water high in the creeks. We found some fine gold on the surface, but nothing of importance. We got back to the Lake, everything was flourishing and the pack train had arrived with supplies for the two stores. The Steamer Anglean was finished and Capt. McDonald took us out for an excursion on the Lake.

Albert and I built a polling boat for the trip to the Yukon and our 1200 pounds of provisions came in on the pack train. The steamer departed with part of the soldiers for Selkirk intending to return for the remainder. The Hootalinqua River was so low that she could not navigate it, so the soldiers went down on rafts and small boats. Albert and I loaded our provisions into our boat for the journey to Dawson. 50 miles down there is a block of mountains close to the lake and three peaks can be seen from there. They are called the three Aces. When we reached the foot of the lake we camped there for the night. The water was full of large trout. Albert and I caught 10 in a very few minutes, weighing from 10 to 20 pounds each. There is a

strong current to the mouth where it joins the Thirty Mile River coming from LaBarge Lake. Many thousand persons came in during the winter and spring and were camped here. Small boath and scows were coming from Lake Bennett loaded with provisions, on their way to Dawson. As we landed on the West bank where there were a number of tents, I saw one that had a big cache of provisions in front. Some of the boxes were marked Fredericton, New Brunswick. A man came out of the tent and I asked him if this outfit came from Fredericton. He said there were eight in the party and he told me their names. We had a long conversation about my home town, and the people I had known in my young days. This man was George Black, afterwards lawyer in Dawson, then Governor of the Yukon, a Captain in the War, and now a member of Parliament from the Yukon.

We floated down to where the creeks and rivers emptied into the Yukon. There were a few tents there but the men were out prospecting on the creeks. We heard a lot of talk about the water at Five Finger Rapids, and the boats that accompanied us asked us to take the lead, so we went through the right hand channel. There was a small roll and a few curling swells. In my lumberjack days I had ridden over rapids and falls that would put this place to shame. We landed at Selkirk opposite the mouth of the Big Pelly River. Some log buildings were going up and the soldiers who had come in were building log barracks. The people at Selkirk were in hopes that the Pelly River and its tributaries would produce millions in gold when they were prospected. We passed the mouth of White River which was throwing out water the color of milk. Twelve miles below we landed on Split-Up Island at the mouth of the Stewart River 70 miles above Dawson. A large number were camped here in

tents, and on a bench we pitched our tent. Discovery had been made on the Black Hill Creek and people were staking claims there. Scows loaded with hay and grain and livestock were on their way to Dawson from Lake Bennett. Here we got news from the thousands that came over the Dyea Trail of the shooting of Soapy Smith at Skagway, the killing of many people in the big snowslide, and the wrecks on the White Horse rapid, and on Thirty Mile River. People were coming up from Dawson disgusted and discouraged with the Country.

Split-Up Island got its name in this way. Many parties that came in over the Dyea Trail would buy their outfits, build their boats on Bennett Lake, and by the time they had reached this island they had got into disputes with each other. They landed here and split up, sawing their boats in half and tearing up their tents.